

WATCH LIST ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

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Foreword

- In 2020, the international community grappled with the novel coronavirus COVID-19 and its devastating impacts. Despite calls from United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres for a global ceasefire, armed conflicts marked by high levels of violence against civilians continued and gravely affected children's rights.

Measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 exacerbated existing challenges and vulnerabilities for all children, but particularly for those living in situations of armed conflict. Pandemic-related restrictions forced schools to close, eliminated safe spaces for children, and decreased access to health care and social services. Child protection actors warned that children living in armed conflict were at increased risk of recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups, abduction, and sexual violence due to deepening poverty, restrictions on movement, and reduced access to essential services. Children deprived of their liberty for alleged or actual association with parties to conflict – oftentimes in crowded and unsanitary conditions – were at high risk of contracting the virus.

Although 2020 heightened feelings of anguish and fear, there were also reasons for hope and signs of progress. In 2020, more than 12,600 children were released from armed groups and forces. Globally, parties to conflict signed at least 35 new commitments, such as roadmaps and action plans, to protect children. The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour achieved universal ratification, ensuring legal protection for all children against the worst forms of child labor, including recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups.

Working together with our network members, we at Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict continued our efforts to advance the UN's children and armed conflict (CAAC) agenda and to protect the rights of children in war, despite challenges intensified by the pandemic.

Through our advocacy with the UN Security Council, Watchlist successfully influenced at least eight Security Council resolutions and 11 country-specific conclusions of the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (SCWG-CAAC). As news of the pandemic dominated international headlines, Watchlist drew attention to the risks and impacts of the pandemic on children in armed conflict through the publication of two informative factsheets with recommendations for international policy makers. In February, Watchlist was invited to brief the UN Security Council on the need to address children and armed conflict concerns in peace processes, building upon Watchlist's earlier policy research and advocacy.

Amidst the continuing expansion of the global counterterrorism agenda, which has encroached upon children's rights, Watchlist published a policy note on handover protocols as practical tools to prevent or reduce the detention of children in armed conflict and facilitate their release and reintegration. Watchlist's research and recommendations garnered significant attention from policy makers and other key stakeholders and contributed to the inclusion of language on handover protocols in the SCWG-CAAC's country-specific conclusions.

Since Watchlist's establishment nearly 20 years ago, its member organizations have benefited from the role that Watchlist plays in coordinating advocacy by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with the Security Council and the UN on children and armed conflict issues. Watchlist helps to ensure an effective flow of information, organizes advocacy meetings and briefings for its members, and facilitates important strategy discussions among NGOs working on these issues. This role enhances the work of individual members and ensures that NGOs are speaking with a unified voice, thus strengthening our collective ability to impact policy. In 2020, Watchlist welcomed Amnesty International as the newest member of its network, deepening the wealth of information and expertise on international human rights.

As countries around the world navigate this difficult and uncertain period in history, we encourage you to find inspiration in collaboration. As a global network, Watchlist is testament to the progress that can be made when we work in tandem to create a better world. It is important to prioritize the protection of children and their rights and ensure these are at the center of international response, recovery, and efforts for sustainable peace.

On behalf of Watchlist and its members, we express our sincere gratitude for your support of our mission and our efforts to defend children's rights and the integrity of the CAAC mandate. It is because of you that we can continue to work towards sustainable peace and a better tomorrow for all children.

DAVID ANDRÉS VIÑAS
*Chair, Watchlist Advisory Board
Representing Save the Children*

ADRIANNE LAPAR
*Director
Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict*



Advocacy

● In 2020, Watchlist advocated for the protection of children’s rights in new and emerging contexts and worked to preserve the integrity of the UN’s children and armed conflict mandate.

Advancing the UN’s Children and Armed Conflict Agenda

In January 2020, Watchlist and Princeton University’s Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination (LISD) co-hosted the sixth annual policy workshop on children and armed conflict at the Princeton Club in New York City. Bringing together incoming members of the Security Council, as well as other Member States, relevant UN offices and agencies, and civil society, the workshop provided an open forum for key stakeholders to discuss concrete and targeted actions to advance the CAAC agenda, strengthen the protection of children in conflict-affected countries, and facilitate agenda-setting for the SCWG-CAAC. In May 2020, a summary report of the policy workshop was issued as an official UN Security Council document ([S/2020/406](#)).

Throughout the year, Watchlist used its [Children and Armed Conflict Monthly Updates](#) to advocate with members of the Security Council for the protection of children in armed conflicts around the world. Monthly Updates include recommendations for mainstreaming concerns affecting children in country situations on the Security Council’s agenda into Council action. With these targeted recommendations, Watchlist successfully influenced eight Security Council resolutions, including

peacekeeping and special political mission mandate renewals in the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Somalia, and South Sudan. Watchlist also provided recommendations to the SCWG-CAAC, ultimately influencing 11 conclusions adopted in 2020, with over 90 percent of its recommendations partially or fully reflected in the final texts. In addition, Watchlist provided recommendations for language in two Security Council presidential statements (PRSTs) on children and armed conflict. Watchlist’s recommendations were substantially reflected in the February PRST on mainstreaming child protection provisions in peacebuilding efforts, as well as the September PRST on protection of schools in armed conflict.

Throughout the year, Watchlist engaged with the UN and its Member States to discuss country-specific CAAC concerns and follow up on the recommendations made in its CAAC Monthly Updates and other publications. Watchlist was particularly pleased to see recommendations to include child protection capacity and a call for the deployment of a child protection adviser in the mandate for the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), as well as strengthened child protection language in the mandate renewal for the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).



Watchlist's advocacy and outreach encouraged active participation in the 2020 Security Council open debate on children and armed conflict. In June, Watchlist published a [special update](#) ahead of the open debate. The two-page brief highlights key CAAC concerns and emerging challenges on the 15th anniversary of the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1612 and the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC). A significant portion of the recommendations from the update were [reflected](#) in Member State interventions. Watchlist also presented its recommendations to the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict in New York during a closed meeting ahead of the open debate in June.

Promoting Accountability for Grave Violations through a Credible, Accurate List of Perpetrators

The mechanism for listing perpetrators in the annexes of the UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict has served as an important tool for the protection of children in war. In recent years, however, the process for determining which perpetrators are listed in the report's annexes has become increasingly politicized, threatening to undermine the report's credibility and weaken its capacity as a tool for promoting accountability and compliance with applicable international law. In response, Watchlist engaged in advocacy efforts to draw attention to these concerns and call for an evidence-based, credible, and accurate list of child rights violators in 2020.

In April 2020, Watchlist [published](#) its fourth annual policy note, ['A Credible List': Recommendations for the Secretary-General's 2020 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict](#), which presents information on grave violations committed against children in 14 countries in 2019 and recommends to the Secretary-General that

10 parties in nine countries be added to his 'list of shame,' listed for additional violations, or investigated further with a view towards possible listing. The policy note also recommends that the Secretary-General include three new situations of concern in his 2020 report.

To further the call for a credible and accurate list, Watchlist coordinated several open letters to Secretary-General António Guterres in 2020. In May, Watchlist was among 20 NGOs to [call](#) on Secretary-General Guterres to hold all perpetrators of grave violations against children to the same standards and publish a complete and accurate list of perpetrators in his 2020 report.

Despite these calls, Watchlist was deeply disappointed with the Secretary-General's 2020 report and the significant disparities between the evidence presented in its narrative and the parties omitted from its annexes although they were responsible for committing grave violations against children. In response, Watchlist coordinated an [open letter](#) from 25 NGOs to Secretary-General Guterres, urging him to reconsider his decisions to delist the Saudi-led coalition for killing and maiming children in Yemen and the Tatmadaw for recruiting and using children in Myanmar. At the Security Council [open debate](#) on CAAC, Member States also expressed support for a credible list of perpetrators, including 18 statements representing 39 Member States that highlighted the need to ensure that the list is based on objective criteria that is consistently applied across country situations.

Ensuring the Rights of Children in Armed Conflict Are Addressed in the COVID-19 Response

The outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic has had severe ramifications for children worldwide, especially those affected by war. In response, Watchlist developed two [factsheets](#) on COVID-19 and children in armed conflict to draw the attention of policy makers and highlight potential risks and impacts of the pandemic on this vulnerable group; these include heightened risk of recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups, sexual violence and exploitation, and military occupation of schools.



Research

- International law recognizes that children, including those associated with armed forces or armed groups, should be treated primarily as victims of serious violations and their reintegration prioritized. However, counterterrorism frameworks often criminalize children associated with groups designated as “terrorist” and take a punitive approach that can be highly detrimental to children’s rights.

In January 2020, Watchlist published a 26-page policy note titled, [Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism: The Erosion of Children’s Rights in Armed Conflict](#), that examines how counterterrorism efforts have impacted the rights of children in conflict-affected countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. It concludes that, by and large, current discourse on terrorism, counterterrorism, and violent extremism undermines international law and fails to address the specific needs and rights of children. The policy note was broadly disseminated to policy audiences in New York and in capitals and used to advocate for compliance with international laws to protect children’s rights.

In follow-up to its 2019 policy note on the military detention of children in armed conflict, Watchlist published a 36-page policy note in December 2020 titled, [A Path to Reintegration: The Role of Handover Protocols in Protecting the Rights of Children Formerly Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups](#). Handover protocols are written agreements either between relevant government ministries, supported by the UN, or between the UN and governments, to swiftly transfer children allegedly

associated with armed groups to civilian child protection agencies for reintegration and to protect their rights. Based on interviews with nearly 50 stakeholders, the policy note details factors contributing to the signing of handover protocols, unique considerations for negotiating such agreements in counterterrorism contexts, and their practical impacts on children’s rights. It provides key recommendations to states affected by armed conflict and those providing security and other assistance to those detaining children in armed conflict, the Security Council, the Secretary-General, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC), UNICEF, and UN offices and agencies engaging on counterterrorism.

In December, Watchlist launched the policy note at a virtual side [event](#) co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Germany, Belgium, Mexico, and Norway to the UN, the OSRSG-CAAC, and UNICEF. Watchlist’s work on handover protocols garnered considerable interest from policy makers, advocates, and practitioners alike, and contributed to the inclusion of language on handover protocols in the SCWG-CAAC’s country-specific conclusions.



Partnerships

- In 2020, Watchlist supported the efforts of local civil society partners in conflict-affected countries to monitor, report on, and respond to grave violations against children.

Support to Local Civil Society Organizations

Since its inception, Watchlist has worked in partnership with local civil society organizations in conflict-affected countries. It is through this collaboration that Watchlist is better able to advocate for children living in situations of armed conflict.

Watchlist's long-time partner in Colombia, the Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls, and youth in armed conflict in Colombia (COALICO), represents civil society as the only permanent national NGO representative on the Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) and plays a vital role in advancing the protection of children's rights in the Colombian armed conflict. Throughout 2020, Watchlist provided project-based support for COALICO's work on the CTFMR, shared information about relevant developments in the Security Council and its Working Group on CAAC, and developed joint advocacy initiatives.

Joint Advocacy Initiatives

In February 2020, Watchlist facilitated an advocacy trip to New York by a former child soldier from Colombia, in coordination with COALICO. At the invitation of the Permanent Missions of Belgium and Sweden, the former child soldier spoke at a high-level event to launch the UN's [Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict](#). The guidance, which was developed by the OSRSG-CAAC with the encouragement of the Security Council (S/PRST/2017/21), identifies specific child protection measures for consideration in peace processes. It builds upon and complements earlier efforts, including Watchlist's [checklist](#) for mainstreaming child protection provisions into peace agreements. At the launch, the former child soldier spoke on his experience representing child victims of the armed conflict during Colombian peace talks.

During 2020, Watchlist also worked with its local civil society partners to develop targeted recommendations for the SCWG-CAAC ahead of relevant country-specific conclusions. Watchlist worked with COALICO to develop recommendations for the Working Group on Colombia, influencing the conclusions that were adopted in July. Later in the year, Watchlist liaised with its civil society partner in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to provide recommendations for the SCWG-CAAC conclusions on the DRC, which were adopted in December.

Institutional Learning and Advocacy

Throughout the year, Watchlist worked with civil society partners to exchange best practices and lessons learned in an effort to further mainstream child protection concerns and educate broader policy audiences on CAAC.

In commemoration of the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers, or Red Hand Day, Watchlist co-sponsored an all-day interactive exhibit at the UN in New York in collaboration with World Vision International, the Permanent Missions of Germany, Belgium, Canada, and Niger, and the OSRSG-CAAC. The interactive exhibit provided for the participation of Member States, UN staff, civil society, and members of the public to paint red hands as a symbol of support for children recruited and used in armed conflict and to raise awareness and end this harmful practice.



Also on Red Hand Day, Belgium convened a high-level Security Council briefing on children and armed conflict and invited the chair of Watchlist's Advisory Board to brief the Council on behalf of civil society. Chaired by Belgium's foreign minister, the briefing focused on integrating child protection into peace processes. Following a presentation by the UN Secretary-General of the new *Practical Guidance for Mediators to Protect Children in Situations of Armed Conflict*, Watchlist's Advisory Board chair highlighted key learnings from Watchlist's research and analysis of child protection in peace processes and urged the Security Council to ensure that the needs and rights of children are addressed in peace processes. On the sidelines of the high-level briefing, Watchlist was invited to a private meeting with Queen Mathilde of Belgium and Foreign Minister Philippe Goffin, who expressed appreciation for Watchlist's work in support of children affected by armed conflict.

As 2020 concluded, Watchlist unveiled its updated innovative [smartphone application](#) on children and armed conflict. Originally launched in 2013 and last updated significantly in 2016, Watchlist's smartphone app serves as a comprehensive tool for policy makers, child rights advocates, and field-based child protection experts with easy-to-access information on children and armed conflict, relevant international laws and standards, and related topics, as well as interactive training tools. In addition to improved navigation and user experience, a new design, and much-needed security and technical updates, the app now features more recent information on CAAC resolutions, conclusions of the SCWG-CAAC, and the Secretary-General's 2020 annual report on CAAC. The app is available for download in the App Store and on Google Play.



Organizational Update

As a global network of human rights and humanitarian organizations, Watchlist strives to end and prevent grave violations against children in war.

An Advisory Board comprised of five distinguished NGOs in the child rights field provides guidance and supervision for Watchlist to achieve its programmatic goals. The Advisory Board – ChildFund Alliance, Human Rights Watch, Save the Children, War Child, and World Vision International – shares responsibility for overseeing Watchlist’s staff, programs, fundraising, and finances.

Watchlist’s network is also powered by nine Associate Members who share a wealth of knowledge and expertise on children’s rights. In 2020, Watchlist proudly welcomed Amnesty International as an Associate Member.

In 2020, Watchlist developed and published its 2020-2023 [Strategic Plan](#), which outlines the network’s goals and priorities for the next three years in order to continue to advance the rights of children embroiled in war. Specifically, Watchlist will seek to: 1) preserve the integrity of the UN’s CAAC mandate; 2) advance the implementation of the CAAC agenda; and 3) protect children’s rights in new and emerging contexts.

Watchlist greatly appreciated the support of several donors and is especially grateful for the funding it received in 2020 from the Governments of Australia, Germany, Luxembourg, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, as well as a sub-grant from Save the Children

Norway. Watchlist also expresses its deepest thanks to individual donors who continue to back its mission through their financial support.

The generous support of our partners and funders enables Watchlist to continue its advocacy work and programming. This financial support, coupled with the contributions of our network members and partners, strengthens Watchlist’s ability to continue working towards a world where all children are protected, safe, and able to reach their full potential.



- Jo Becker, Watchlist Advisory Board member, representing Human Rights Watch

Financials

	1/1/2019 through 12/31/2019*	1/1/2020 through 12/31/2020
REVENUE		
Grants and Contributions	\$ 112,668.63	\$ 159,610.68
Government Grants	\$ 339,382.53	\$ 273,562.78
Other Revenue	\$ 1,715.22	\$ -
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 453,766.38	\$ 433,173.46
EXPENSES		
Personnel Related Expenses		
Gross Payroll Expense	\$ 114,707.70	\$ 174,892.33
Payroll Fees	\$ 835.00	\$ 1,260.00
Payroll Taxes	\$ 9,722.83	\$ 14,048.81
Benefits	\$ 12,949.08	\$ 19,024.94
Total Personnel Related Expenses	\$ 138,214.61	\$ 209,226.08
Non-Personnel Related Expenses		
Rent & Occupancy	\$ 29,863.32	\$ 23,400.00
Telephone Expense	\$ 3,501.43	\$ 1,905.33
Sub Contractors - PC	\$ 44,605.00	\$ 72,315.44
Media, Website, Programming Expense	\$ 2,972.05	\$ 4,568.57
Postage/Delivery	\$ 280.73	\$ -
Printing	\$ 1,880.64	\$ 1,201.27
Office Supplies	\$ 427.22	\$ 336.29
Donations Out	\$ 64,417.63	\$ 27,700.00
Equip Purchase Under \$5,000	\$ 6,270.91	\$ 1,018.75
Program Related Supplies	\$ -	\$ 38.48
Legal Fees	\$ -	\$ 2,014.00
Dues and Subscriptions	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 75.00
Travel Expense	\$ 8,301.23	\$ (1,534.35)
Meals/Entertainment Non-Travel	\$ 694.20	\$ 819.21
Conferences and Meetings	\$ 14,957.20	\$ 1,014.25
Other Expenses	\$ 1,271.66	\$ -
Total Non-Personnel Related Expenses	\$ 185,443.22	\$ 134,872.24
Fees		
Bank Fees	\$ 613.35	\$ 942.15
Administrative Fees	\$ 48,237.93	\$ 49,231.29
Annual Fee Expense	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00
Total Fees	\$ 50,531.28	\$ 51,673.44
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 374,189.11	\$ 395,771.76
Surplus/(Deficit)	\$ 79,577.27	\$ 37,401.70
Ending Net Assets	\$ 214,428.09	\$ 251,829.79

* Watchlist was a fiscally sponsored program of the Tides Center until March 31, 2019. Since April 2019, Watchlist has been a fiscally sponsored program of United Charitable, a US-based 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization.



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